

Chapter 6

Fathers on Leave Alone in Finland: Negotiations and Lived Experiences

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6.1 Introduction

A more equal sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers has been a recurrent aim of gender equality policy in Finland (STM 1999; Lammi-Taskula et al. 2009; STM 2014). Increasing men's activity in childcare has been understood as important for promoting the position of women in the labour market. Since 1990s, emphasis has also been put on the positive impact of leave for the emotional relationship between father and child (Rantalaaho 2003, 202–203).

Compared to the other Nordic countries (Gislason and Eydal 2011), the development of individual parental leave rights for fathers has been slow in Finland and the take-up rate of leave alone by fathers is a more recent phenomenon. While the previous generation of fathers were pioneers of caring masculinity and were often met with doubt when taking any leave, it is today normal and even expected that a father takes some weeks of paternity leave, with the mother, when a child is born. However, mothers still take the main share of parental leave and the take-up of longer leave periods by fathers is not very common. Slowly but steadily, the number of fathers taking leave from paid employment to care for a young child when the mother returns to work has indeed increased. According to the Family Barometer survey in 2014, men in their thirties are today willing to stay at home with their child for 1 or 2 months, while men in their twenties are ready to take a 6-month leave (Lainiala 2014).

Many obstacles have been mentioned for fathers' take-up of parental leave, often based on assumptions rather than facts (Lammi-Taskula 2007). The introduction of a father's quota in 2003 has encouraged more fathers to take leave. Still, fathers do

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need to negotiate both with their spouse if they want to take a longer leave period that is transferable between parents rather than an individual right. Also, a statutory right to take leave does not count out negotiations with the employer.

In this chapter, the negotiations in the family and at the workplace about the take-up of a longer leave period by the father as well as the experiences of fathers who have taken leave are analysed. While a short paternity leave may provide much needed help for the mother as well as create a good start for the father-child relationship, staying at home for some days or weeks is not likely to have an impact on the gendered division of labour at home, or to affect a father's position in the workplace (Lammi-Taskula and Salmi 2014). Longer periods of leave make it possible for the father to take full responsibility of both childcare and housework while the mother is not at home during the day. At the workplace, a longer leave period is more likely to get noticed as tasks need to be reorganized, which may also shift power relations.

6.2 Theoretical Framework and Previous Research

The theoretical framework for this study links approaches of social policy and gender studies. The preconditions and impact of fathers' longer leave periods at home alone with the child are analysed with the help of R.W. Connell's structural model of gender relations (1987, 2000). In this model, four dimensions of gender relations are specified: cultural (symbolic) ideas about women and men or femininities and masculinities; material conditions related to the division of labour; individual desires and emotions; and power relations.

These four dimensions form configurations of gender relations, such as the sharing or not sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers. The ideas of gendered parental responsibilities represented in the leave legislation are actualised in the practical division of labour between mothers and fathers. Emotional motivations are pulling parents into gendered practices or pushing them away from such practices, and power relations are always present in negotiations about parental rights and responsibilities (Lammi-Taskula 2007).

Previous research on father's parental leave in Finland has shown that material conditions such as the labour market situation and income level of parents are strongly related to the take-up patterns of parental leave by mothers and fathers. A weaker labour market position tends to push mothers out of paid employment and into unpaid care work, while the better opportunities pull men into paid work and away from family life (Lammi-Taskula and Salmi 2014; Haataja 2005; Lammi-Taskula 2007; Salmi et al. 2009).

Family life is the most intimate life sphere, and strong emotional aspects are intertwined with the gendered conceptions and negotiations of parental responsibilities. Despite the long history of the dual-earner family model in Finland, fathers still need to reflect on their breadwinning responsibility in the construction of a "good father" identity. Similarly, mothers of young children try to make choices

related to their childcare responsibility that position them as “good mothers” (Lammi-Taskula 2007). A qualitative study (Eerola and Mykkänen 2014) analysed gendered narratives of first-time fathers in Finland and found two counter narratives to the culturally dominant narrative of the “decent father”. While the “decent father” narrative accepts and encourages fathers’ participation in childcare, the main responsibility is still seen as “naturally” resting with the mother. The counter narrative of “equal father” emphasizes the similarity of mothers and fathers in childcare and stay-at-home fathers who actively want to take care of their children are an essential part of this narrative.

In the context of shifting gender ideologies, narratives and socio-economic conditions, power relations between parents are under constant negotiation. In these negotiations, the rewards and costs, threats and promises of alternative actions are considered (Scott 2001, 138). In everyday family life, power relations can come about as a struggle over who is the master of the situation; who can decide who is what, who does what, and who gets what, when and how (Jonasdottir 1991, 38–39).

6.3 Leave Possibilities for Fathers in Finland

Parental leave as a welfare state institution reflects the motives and goals of policy makers to affect the choices and actions of citizens. Through national legislation on parental leave and parental benefits, possibilities as well as limitations are provided for parental practices and the division of labour between mothers and fathers in paid and unpaid work. By ensuring certain rights and benefits for parents of young children, the legislation shapes the ways people think about family life and parenthood as well as about gender; what motherhood and fatherhood “are” and how they should be like (Lammi-Taskula 2007).

In Finland, the role of men in families was first discussed in the 1960s as women’s participation in the labour market was growing. A new gender ideology was shaped mainly among young academic radicals (Jallinoja 1983, 123–127). Their society called ‘Association 9’ was the first one to propose paternity leave in 1967 (Husu et al. 1995, 366), and it took another decade until paternity leave was introduced in 1978. At first it was 2 weeks and later 3 weeks, to be taken while the mother is also at home on maternity or parental leave.

Unlike maternity and paternity leave that are individual, gendered leave rights, parental leave is transferable i.e. it can be shared between the parents as they wish. Since 1985, fathers in Finland are entitled to take parental leave after the mother has completed her 18-week maternity leave. Parental leave is a period of 26 weeks, starting when the baby is about 3 months old and ending when the baby is about 10 months old. Parents cannot take parental leave simultaneously, so in order for the father to be on leave, the mother needs to return to the labour market or studies.

The idea of an individual father’s quota was discussed at the end of the 1990s in Finland as other Nordic countries already had introduced such quotas (STM 1999).

The idea of the quota is that if the father does not take his leave period, it cannot be transferred to the mother, i.e. the family loses it. Norway was the first country in the world to introduce a 4-week father's quota in 1994. Sweden followed in 1995 and Denmark in 1999. During a 10-year period (2003–2012), there was a kind of a father's quota of parental leave called the father's month in Finland. At first it was 4 weeks long: if the father took the last 2 weeks of the transferable parental leave, he got 2 bonus weeks to be used at the end of the parental leave period. In 2007, take-up was made more flexible so that the father's month could be taken until the child is about 16 months old. In 2010, 2 more bonus weeks were added to the father's month making it 6 weeks long. In 2013, the father's month and the traditional paternity leave were replaced by a 9 week individual paternity leave of which 3 weeks can be taken simultaneously with the mother. The new paternity leave can be taken until the child is 2 years old. While the father is on paternity leave with one child, the mother may take leave with a new baby, but not with the same child.

In 1985 both fathers and mothers also got the possibility to take care leave after parental leave. Unlike paternity and parental leave that are relatively well compensated with an income-related benefit (on average 70 % of the previous income with no ceiling), care leave is covered with a low flat-rate benefit. The home care allowance (HCA) is paid until the child is 3, if the child is not in public daycare. The HCA is very popular among families in Finland, and recipients have mainly been mothers. About half of mothers use it less than twelve months (i.e. return to work before the child is 2 years old), while one in six mothers use the whole HCA period.

6.4 Take-Up of Leave by Fathers

The oldest form of leave, paternity leave, was first used primarily in well-educated families (Säntti 1990) but for two decades it has been taken irrespective of the parents' socio-economic background (Salmi et al. 2009). Taking paternity leave has thus changed from being an exceptional practice to an 'everyman's mass movement' (Lammi-Taskula 2007). In 2013, 58100 children were born in Finland and 47800 fathers took paternity leave while the mother was on maternity leave (Kela 2014). According to a survey in 2006 (Salmi et al. 2009), taking full paternity leave i.e. 3 weeks when the child is born is more common with the first child than with the second or third child. The main obstacle for paternity leave reported by mothers is the father's busy work situation.

Most fathers today think it is self-evident to take paternity leave (Salmi et al. 2009; Eerola 2014). The motives for taking paternity leave are however related to education level: while highly educated fathers want to spend time with the baby, less educated fathers feel they should help the spouse (Salmi et al. 2009).

Before the father's month was introduced in 2003, only 2–3 % of fathers (about 1500 men per year) took parental leave in Finland. These fathers had a higher education level and were more often in a white collar expert position than those who only took paternity leave (Lammi-Taskula 2003). After the introduction of the

father's month, take-up increased year after year so that in 2012 about one third of fathers (18 000 men per year) took their month. The take-up of the father's month reveals a similar pattern as the paternity leave in the first decades: well-educated men with well-educated spouses have been more likely to take this leave (Salmi et al. 2009).

Interviews with first-time fathers about paternal responsibilities (Eerola 2014) showed that a longer parental leave is an obvious decision mainly for those fathers who see their emotional presence in the child's life as an important part of their fathering.

During the first 4 years of its existence, the father's month had to be taken immediately after the parental leave period, which turned out to be the main obstacle for fathers to take it as most mothers continued on care leave after their parental leave period (Salmi et al. 2009). There are no statistics on care leave, but the share of fathers among recipients of the home care allowance has remained very low. In 2012, there were only about 1700 fathers (3,3 % of recipients) compared to 49 000 mothers who had received home care allowance after their parental leave period ended in 2010 (Kela 2013). As the home care allowance is paid as an alternative to the use of public daycare services, not all recipients of this flat-rate benefit are necessarily on leave.

According to a survey with parents of young children (Salmi et al. 2014), the take-up of care leave by fathers is related to similar socio-economic patterns as the take-up of the father's month. Leave is taken more often by fathers who have a high education level and whose spouse is also highly educated. The longest periods at home with the home care allowance are taken by mothers with low education levels. Fathers take more often care leave with the first child than with the second or third child, and older fathers take more leave than those in their twenties.

6.5 Data and Methods

To explore the negotiation processes and impact on gender relations related to the take-up of longer parental leave periods by fathers in Finland, seven thematic interviews were conducted with fathers during 2013. The interviewed men were 30–41 years of age and had one or two children. All fathers had taken a longer leave period to take care of their child. The total length of leave alone with the child varied between 2 months and 2 years (Table 6.1).

All men had a relatively high education level: five out of seven had a university degree. None of them were in traditional blue-collar jobs. Also the spouses of the interviewed fathers were highly educated. In the age group 30–39, almost half of women in Finland have a university degree while five out of seven spouses in the data have it. Among men in this age group, the proportion of university degrees is less than a third and almost half of employees are in a blue-collar position. The families in the data are thus not representative of the population in general as they have a higher than average socio-economic position.

Table 6.1 Interviewed fathers

Alias	Age	Occupation	Children (age)	Length of leave alone	Spouse's occupation
Jussi	30	Social worker, public sector	Girl 4,5	4 months	Supermarket department manager
			Boy 2,5	6 months	
Tuomo	31	Civil engineer, private sector	Girl, 3	2 months	Secretary, private sector
Joni	34	Photographer, self employed	Girl, 2	4 months	Researcher, university
Mika	35	Project manager, private sector	Boy 3,5	3 months	Senior inspector, public sector
			Boy 1,5	4 months	
Pekka	37	Journalist, public sector	Girl 7	8 months	Journalist, private sector
			Boy 2,5	8 months	
Olli	39	Marketing manager, private sector	Girl 2,5	2 years	(ex / Director, private sector)
Aki	43	Library manager, public sector	Boy 2,5	10 months	Researcher, private sector

The fathers were contacted through a snowball method i.e. personal networks were used to find them. Several attempts were made to find fathers with a lower education level and/or blue-collar position but in the end none were interviewed due to possible ethical problems (the blue-collar candidates were spouses of friends or colleagues). Further research is needed to secure a frame to sample a broader range of fathers taking leave both alone and with partners.

The interviewed fathers lived in the capital area of Finland in three different cities. The interviews lasted from 60 to 90 min and were conducted in several places: three interviews in the interviewee's home, two in his workplace, one at a café and one at the interviewer's office. The common interview guide (see Chap. 1) was used with themes ranging from emotions connected to the new-born baby to opinions about family policy in Finland. The list of themes was used as a checklist during the discussion rather than as a rigid order of questions, but most themes were still more or less covered in all interviews. The data were analysed with thematic analysis. Themes were mainly linked to the original questions of the common interview guide but sometimes also appeared in a more inductive manner.

6.6 Negotiations at Home and at Work

6.6.1 *Negotiations Between Spouses*

Couples often have similar educational backgrounds, but the education level of women in child-bearing age in Finland is higher than that of men. In the age group 25–29 about 40 % of women compared to 23 % of men have a university degree, and in the age group 30–35 the corresponding figures are 50 and 32 % (Statistics Finland

2014). It is thus quite likely that mothers of young children have career ambitions and expect their partners to share childcare responsibilities in order to avoid the fate of double burden i.e. taking care of most unpaid work at home after paid work at the workplace.

In a survey among parents of young children in Finland, a large majority of fathers who had taken parental leave reported an agreement with their partner about the mother not being the primary carer for their child. Also mothers whose partner had taken parental leave reported consensus between partners about shared child care responsibility. However, sharing parental leave between parents does not always mean the parents unanimously reject separate parental responsibilities. Among those who shared parental leave, one in ten fathers and more than one in four mothers reported a mutual agreement in the family about the mother being the primary carer for the child. In these families, the father's parental leave may have been a practical solution and not understood as his taking full care responsibility. Agreement about the mother's primacy can also be related to the timing and length of the father's leave period so that it is short and takes place as late as possible (Lammi-Taskula 2007).

Among the interviewed fathers, the primacy of mothercare was not a central theme in their narratives about how childcare has been arranged in the family. In some of the families, the father had more experience of young children than the mother when their first child was born. Even when the mother was more experienced and provided advice, the fathers created their own caring practices and style during leave.

She had more previous experience of childcare and she gave me a lot of advice with the newborn baby, and it was ok for me. But when I started my leave I soon realized that there is not just one way of taking good care of children. I would say I am more relaxed with our daughter. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

It was very important for the fathers to be taken seriously as competent parents. This was not always the case for example at the hospital or at the well-baby clinic, or later in daycare. Aki was very upset about the way he was treated at the hospital after the birth of his son: he had a major role in taking care of the baby as the mother was not well, but he felt he was not trusted by the nurses.

My spouse had <health problems> and we stayed a bit longer at the hospital after the baby was born. The nurses kept bossing me around, it was an unpleasant experience because I was doing everything I possibly could with the baby, like feeding him as the mother could not breastfeed. The staff had a kind of an old fashioned way of thinking. Aki (library manager, 43)

Ideological aspects of gender equality in relation to the division of labour in childcare was discussed in some of the families but not all of them. Equal responsibility in practice was however taken for granted by the interviewed fathers. Pekka says his spouse finds gender equality important while for him, participating in childcare was more self-evident than ideological. He *simply wanted to spend time with his children*.

Gender equality is very important for my wife, and I had nothing against it. I want to take part in everything and absolutely do not think that some things are only the mother's responsibility and others only the father's. My wife was maybe a bit worried about my participation in childcare, whereas for me it was self evident to participate, because it is my child and I want to participate. Pekka (journalist, 37)

The principles of child care and education were usually shared by the parents. Many fathers also said their own mother was an important role model for them. Joni has adopted his parenting ideology from his mother:

My mother thinks that a child, even a young one understands a lot. That has also been my starting point as a father, for I never ridicule or patronize my child and always treat her as an equal human being. Joni (photographer, 34)

A common motivation for the father's leave was the parents' shared interest to provide home care for the children. When parental leave ends, the child is about ten months old, and most parents felt that he or she was too young to start in daycare at that age. Tuomo took 2 months of care leave after his father's month to postpone the daycare start until the place of their choice was available. Aki, who took two periods of leave, first 6 months and later another 4 months, explains that they almost managed to fulfill their goal of 3 years' home care for their only child whom they got at quite a late age:

Our child has not yet been in daycare, he has been in home care all the time. In August, when he will be two years nine months old, he will start in daycare. It was our goal that he would be in home care until he is three, and we have succeeded quite well, only three months short. Aki (library manager, 43)

We wanted our child to go to family daycare, so we got a place only one kilometer from our house. My spouse returned to work two months before the daycare started and I took leave during the remaining months. Tuomo (civil engineer, 31)

The typical pattern was that the mother stayed at home during the first year, taking all of the transferable parental leave and often also some care leave. The father took 2 or 3 weeks of paternity leave when the baby was born and the mother was on maternity leave. It was often her initiative that led to the father's take-up of leave, like in Mika's story:

I think it was during pregnancy that we started to think about leave. It was clear from the beginning that we did not want the children to start very young in daycare. How to organise it in practice, I think my wife probably asked if I wanted to take a longer leave and it felt like a good solution. I was happy to take the opportunity for a break from work and on the other hand, it is good to spend time with children when they are young. Mika (project manager, 35)

The fathers usually first took the father's month i.e. 6 weeks of parental leave with income-related benefit, and then continued on care leave with the flat-rate benefit. The fathers also combined their annual holiday with parental or care leave. As a full salary is paid during the annual holiday, this combination was not an economic burden for the family. Pekka stayed at home for 8 months with his son:

I took two weeks of paternity leave when the baby was born and one more week later. Then, when he was about 16 months old, I stayed at home, combining annual holiday with care

leave. We did not want to put him in daycare before he was two years old. It was okay for my wife to stay at home a year and a half, after which I took the rest. Pekka (journalist, 37)

Olli and Jussi are exceptional among the interviewed fathers in that it was their initiative rather than their spouse's to share leave and stay at home for a longer period of time. Taking leave was about rethinking priorities and enjoying the time together with the child. Jussi says that as soon as he knew he was going to be a father, it was his intention to stay at home on leave:

With our first child it was more my initiative, I wanted to take leave and my wife did not oppose. We talked about this already during pregnancy, and when she was born, the idea was fortified that I would take all the leave possible. My wife realized she is not a stay-at-home kind of person and she was ready to return to work. Jussi (social worker, 30)

Olli started his leave much earlier than the other fathers. He and his spouse stayed at home together for half a year on his initiative, because he realized that his spouse was getting tired. They could afford this because of the high income level of both parents. As his spouse then got a new executive job, Olli continued on leave.

She was born in spring and I had decided already during the winter that I would take all the leave possible. When she was two months old I saw that my spouse was quite tired, so I said I could also stay at home. So we both stayed at home. When the baby was five months old my spouse got a really good job offer, so I encouraged her to take the opportunity. As she started in the new job when the baby was ten months old, we moved to another city and I stayed at home. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

The mother's work situation played a central role in the negotiations between parents about how to share leave. Joni and Aki both had spouses who worked as researchers and needed to return to work because of project timetables. Joni's spouse was eager to continue working on her doctoral thesis and Aki's spouse had to return due to research funding regulations. Unlike most of the other parents, Aki explains how they split the leave period into several parts: she took the first part, and then he was at home while she returned to work, then she took some leave again and finally he stayed at home until the child started in daycare.

We talked about it already during pregnancy. It was our intention to take turns and that's what we have done. It was decisive for us that she had academy funding, she could only stay away for one year or she would have lost the money. Aki (library manager, 43)

Mika, who was currently on leave with his second child at the time of the interview, also told how the parents split the leave, but he only took one period while his spouse took two leave periods. Annual holidays were also combined to be able to keep the child in home care:

My wife stayed at home a bit longer than one year. I am not able to take more than four months of leave. Then my wife takes some more months of leave and then we have summer holidays before he starts in daycare. Mika (project manager, 35)

In some cases, the interviewed fathers said their spouse was not really a "home-maker type" and were thus happy to return to work while the father also wanted to stay at home with the child. Jussi explained that his spouse returned to work when the first child was 1 year old, and with the second child they decided to have the

same pattern, but she then got a new job during her leave so he started his leave when the baby was 6 months old. Joni, Mika and Pekka all told me that their spouse was quite ready to go back to the office after 1 year at home.

Even if family economy is seen as the most important obstacle for fathers' take-up of longer leave periods, the interviewed fathers did not see money as an obstacle for their leave. Olli, who had a good job with a high income before his leave, says he did not think about money at all but made choices based on his values. Joni saw his 4-month leave as so short that money was not an issue.

Many people have told me they would have liked to stay at home longer but could not afford it. To be honest, I think that is simply crap. It is possible if you want it. It may have a price, and I don't mean just money but also career. Say three months or half a year, you can always negotiate it with the bank. We have a simple life and I don't think we are missing out on anything. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

It was such a short time, so it did not really matter to us. Yes, the home care allowance is a small amount of money, but it was not a problem. Joni (photographer, 34)

Compared to most of the other couples in the sample, Jussi and his spouse had a lower income level; they were both earning less than the average male or female income in Finland. The leave period with the income-related benefit (about 70 % of previous income) was not a problem for the family economy, but calculations showed that they needed to freeze the payments of their mortgage during his care leave while he only got the flat-rate benefit. The same would probably have been true had she been the one taking care leave.

We used the calculator available on the Social Insurance Institution web page. The difference was not so big during the father's month, only a couple of hundred euros. During care leave it was more so we negotiated with the bank that we did not need to pay all mortgage for our house loan, and we only paid the interest. Jussi (social worker, 30)

The mothers who returned to work and handed over childcare responsibility to their spouses did not face any negative reactions from their social network, at least not according to the interviewed fathers. This is probably because most mothers had stayed at home at least one year and used all of the transferable parental leave (with the exception of Jussi's wife). Instead, the families received positive comments, especially from older women and men. Many of the fathers had friends with similar leave sharing practices, so they did not need to justify their choices.

Some of my wife's colleagues are older generation. It has mainly been admiration, they think it is great that the father wants to stay at home. Not so much comments for our friends, as we have many friends who have the same situation. I have some male friends who have taken a longer leave than the mother, so it is nothing new. We have not needed to explain. At work we have young people in the same family situation. Mika (project manager, 35)

Among our friends there are others who have a similar situation, it is almost like typical that also the father stays at home for some time. Some older men have said they envy me as it was not possible for them to stay at home when their children were young. Joni (photographer, 34)

6.6.2 *Negotiations at the Workplace*

Workplaces today need to compete for highly skilled workers through advantageous working conditions (den Dulk and Peper 2009). Traditionally, public sector workplaces have supported work-family life reconciliation measures, and encouraged men's take-up of leave at least in the Nordic countries (Brandth and Kvande 2002; Bygren and Duvander 2006; Haas et al. 2002).

In Finland, the short paternity leave that is taken when the child is born has become normalized and it seems to be self-evident also at private-sector workplaces. When we interviewed human resources managers about leave take-up, they told us that taking paternity leave is automatic or even desirable. Some collective agreements provide full pay during 2 or 3 weeks of paternity leave, and there are also organizational practices that encourage fathers to take their full 3-week paternity leave. Parental leave, however, is still often seen as an exceptional and private matter. Male employees are not necessarily encouraged to take longer leave periods, but if they apply for a parental or care leave they usually will be supported (Salmi et al. 2009).

The interviews with the stay-at-home fathers show that it is still easier to negotiate a longer leave period in public sector workplaces than in private sector companies. Aki used to work in the private sector when his child was born. He then changed to the public sector and finds the take-up of his latter leave period much easier:

In the private company it was more difficult. But I was also quite sick and tired of that place so I did not mind telling them that I'll be off now. My current job is in the public sector so basically I simply notified the employer about my leave. When I was interviewed for the job I asked if I could start later after my leave and they accepted. Aki (library manager, 43)

Pekka works in a large state organization and it was no problem at all for him to take a long leave period with both of his two children. The age structure of the organization is such that many employees take leave periods all the time, so Pekka was not exceptional:

I simply told my employer that I would be on leave, and I just notified them about the dates. There was no problem: they were very flexible and just said ok. I think it is my statutory right to take leave and they cannot say anything. I have many colleagues with young children so it is not unusual either. Pekka (journalist 37)

There are also differences between private companies in the manager's attitudes towards fathers taking leave. Tuomo took paternity leave when his child was born and the father's month when the child was about ten months old. His spouse was at home on annual holiday during the father's month and continued on care leave until the child was 2 years old. Tuomo tells me that he had no problems at the workplace when he took paternity leave and the father's month. He then changed jobs and took care leave for 2 months, and realized that his new boss was not happy about that. The boss is the main reason why Tuomo is now considering leaving his current workplace:

The boss gave me some negative comments about the leave, and now he is also commenting about my coming later to work when I take my child to daycare. You see I want to take her there a bit later so that we can avoid the rush hour and save a lot of travel time. We have flexitime at work but not many people seem to use it. I am getting fed up with my boss's attitude and it is might be time to change jobs. Tuomo (civil engineer, 31)

Mika's boss is more understanding, but as the company is quite small, leave periods are more problematic than in a bigger organisation. Mika had to negotiate about the length of his leave and he was ready to make the necessary compromise, but he feels his current boss would have been more supportive than the one he had when he took the leave:

I had a talk with my boss, who was new in the company, and somehow he did not want me to take a very long leave. I quite understand that as the company is quite small (25 employees) and if people are absent for a longer time they lose a relatively important input. Almost all the time someone is on maternity leave or paternity leave, and some have taken longer sick leaves as well so it has quite a big impact. I have a different boss now and he has actually taken three months of leave himself. Had he been my boss then, I might have been able to take six months instead of four. Mika (project manager, 35)

Among the interviewed fathers, Olli took the longest leave period and also experienced the biggest career change because of his leave. He worked as a manager in a multinational company when his child was born, and the idea that fathers took parental leave was a completely strange phenomenon for his superior who was not a Finn. At first Olli took some months of parental leave but wanted then to continue his leave because the mother of his child got a new job. It then became clear to him that he was expected to leave the company, which he also did.

I had to argue with my boss and tell him that I have a legal right to take parental leave. I gave him the telephone number of my union lawyer in case he wanted to check the facts. At that point I had to consider the consequences of the leave for my career. When I told them I was going to continue on care leave after my parental leave they kind of let me know that I was not welcome back there anymore. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

6.6.3 Fathers' Experiences of Daily Life on Leave Alone

All the interviewed fathers had taken both paternity leave together with the mother when their child was a newborn, and parental or care leave i.e. staying at home alone with the child. The experience of parental leave was different from the experience of paternity leave as there was a sense of autonomy and full responsibility. All fathers said there were at least some differences in the parenting styles between the parents. Some fathers were more cautious and protective than the mother, while others were more relaxed and easy-going. Jussi sees these different styles as something inevitable and positive:

I was able to do everything the way I wanted to do it. We have different style of doing things, which is the way it should be of course. Jussi (social worker, 30)

In narrating their experiences, the fathers described the leave period at home alone as something very different from paid employment. Even if child care can be tiring and chaotic sometimes, there was a sense of freedom that the fathers enjoyed very much. Mika enjoyed the lack of timetables during his leave:

I could do what I want and not be so tied up in timetables. There was less stress, though of course I was sometimes busy during the day having to dress and undress and feed the children, but it was different. That was the main experience, it was quite nice. Mika (project manager, 35)

Many aspects of the everyday life at home with the child came as a surprise, usually as a positive one. Even if the fathers may have had some experience of young children before they had their first child, they did not really have an idea what it would be like to have a close emotional relationship and to spend all day with their child. Olli used to see himself as a career-oriented person, but soon after starting his leave he found a completely new side to himself. As he really enjoyed staying at home with his child, he was willing to extend his leave:

I had no idea what it would be like, if it was going to be suffering or something nice. I soon realised that I liked it. After some months I thought I could just as well stay at home longer. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

While the sense of freedom was important for some of the fathers, some of them said having a routine made life easier. For Aki, a strict routine was a way of coping even if he did not really like timetables. Jussi, who had work experience from school, had a regular daily and weekly timetable with his first child, which he was very proud of:

It did not take long before I had created a routine: getting up and having breakfast, then heading to the playground. Then making lunch and doing the laundry. I tried especially in the beginning to show my wife how well I was doing. I made a different kind of meal every day and kept the house very clean. We also visited my grandparents once a week and spent the whole day with them. My daughter liked to go there because she received so much attention from everyone. Jussi (social worker, 30)

We really need a routine. I have been really bad with routines, so I had to force myself to create some, otherwise nothing works. I follow a strict daily timetable and twice a week we go to the park, we always arrive and leave at the same hour. Aki (library manager, 43)

The sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers correlates with the sharing of daily housework (Lammi-Taskula 2007). The parent who is at home on leave is usually responsible for not only childcare but also other chores that need to be done on a daily basis. Thus, a fair amount of cooking, cleaning, dish washing and laundry is included in a typical day during parental leave.

All the interviewed fathers said they like to cook and were doing that already before their leave, whereas there were different practices related to cleaning and doing the laundry. Mika managed to leave the main responsibility of laundry to his spouse despite taking two 4-month periods of leave when he was at home alone with the children:

I like to cook, my wife does not. Someone commented on her getting a warm meal when she returns from work and I had to point out that I used to cook the meals after work even

when she was on leave. My wife likes other chores, she tidies up and does the laundry. There is a lot of laundry and I try to hang it but she puts them in the machine. We are both less keen on cleaning. Mika (project manager, 35)

Pekka and Joni see the daily housework tasks as part of the package for whoever is at home on leave. Thus, they said it was self-evident for them to take the main responsibility of shopping, cooking and cleaning during their leave.

When I was on leave I took care of cleaning, shopping, cooking, all that basic work. It was natural to do that, I can't remember any quarreling about it. I did as much as I could, that was part of my job during leave. Pekka (journalist, 37)

The one who was at home took bigger responsibility of housework. So of course I took care of that when I was on leave. Joni (photographer, 34)

Both Olli and Jussi describe the gender roles in their family as reversed not only during the leave period but in general. Jussi was doing more housework both when his spouse was on leave and when he was on leave himself, whereas Olli took more responsibility during his long leave period.

When she was at work and I was on leave, it felt like I did everything at home. Maybe I am exaggerating but that's how I felt then. I guess the gender roles in our family were the opposite of how they usually are. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

When she was on leave, I used to cook the meals in the evening for the next day, and did the shopping as well. There was no change when I was at home. I also mainly do the cleaning and the laundry. My wife says she does not bother to go to the store because she does not know what to buy anyway. Sometimes she suggests she could hang the laundry in order to have a moment alone. I have sometimes noticed I try too much to take care of everything. Jussi (social worker, 30)

As the leave periods of all interviewed fathers were relatively long – at least three months – they inevitably learned many new skills. On the one hand, their organizing skills improved as they juggled the various demands of everyday life at home. On the other hand, they also became more patient and learned to adapt to changes and turn-ups that are characteristic in life with young children. Jussi finds he can use these skills also at his work:

I learned how to organize time-use and take the children's needs into account. Everything was planned, from visits to also meeting other adults in the park for example. I can use these skills at work now, we go through the week on Mondays so we know what is going to happen each day. It is now also easier to adapt to changes than before. There were sudden changes with the children when I was home, and I have them daily at work. Jussi (social worker, 30)

In addition to learning practical skills, the long leave period gave a possibility for soul-searching and pondering about life priorities for some of the fathers. Pekka explains how making sand cakes with his daughter stimulated in-depth analysis about life:

I probably have learned to be systematic, fast and effective in many ordinary mundane tasks. But the most important learning has to do with personal growth. It was a surprise to realise how impatient I could be, I always thought I was a really cool and calm person who does not flap about anything. The little one-year-old really pushed my buttons and I had to

manage my anger in a new way. I also began to think more about profound questions of life while sitting by the sandpit. Sandcakes are like life itself: it is not the completed cake that is important but the process of making it. Pekka (journalist, 37)

6.7 Conclusions

Reconciliation of paid employment and family responsibilities is one of the key challenges in reaching gender equality. Sharing child care responsibilities between mothers and fathers is a corner stone of this reconciliation. The possibilities for sharing the unpaid childcare work are promoted by parental leave legislation in Finland: fathers are given possibilities for paternity, parental and care leave. During the past decade, fathers have had a special “father’s month” of leave that cannot be transferred to the mother.

Over this period it has become a normal practice for fathers to take some weeks of paternity leave when their child is born in order to support the mother after delivery and to get to know the new family member. During paternity leave, the father is able to participate in childcare but usually the mother bears the main responsibility. Changing the gendered division of labour at home requires that the father becomes the main carer for a longer period of time. As long as parental leave is transferable between parents and not earmarked for the father, only a small minority of fathers take it. Since the introduction of the father’s quota, a positive step towards the goal of gender equality has taken place as the number of fathers taking their individual leave month (6 weeks of leave with income-related benefit) has increased every year. Today, one in three fathers use their leave quota, but not all of them are home alone with their child: the mother may take annual holiday or stay at home on unemployment benefit during the father’s month.

The fathers interviewed for this study are exceptional in that they have taken more leave than most fathers in Finland. The usual pattern for participants was to take 2 to 3 weeks of paternity leave with the mother, the father’s month and some care leave. The leave periods during which these fathers stayed at home and took on the main responsibility for childcare varied from 2 months to 2 years.

Sharing parental leave between mothers and fathers is in practice always negotiated between parents. In the negotiations about the take-up of leave, several aspects are intertwined. Both material preconditions as well as emotional and ideological aspects play a role in how the division of leave between mothers and fathers is organized. The mother’s position in the labour market is decisive: in order for the father to take a longer leave period, his spouse needs to have a job to return to. The interviews show that the fathers who took long leave periods were aware of the fact that their spouse’s career opportunities and gender equality awareness added to her willingness to return to work instead of taking the main part of the transferable parental and care leave herself.

The father’s leave would however hardly take place without his own desire to stay at home and take care of his child. When parents disagree about gendered parental responsibilities, self-evident conceptions are questioned and more negotia-

tions and compromises are needed. This kind of disagreements were not reported by the interviewed fathers. The interviews show that it was relatively easy for the fathers to negotiate the sharing of childcare responsibility as the parents shared similar ideals of childcare and what is best for their child. Also, agreement by the parents about gender equality as something positive was related to the sharing of leave.

Mothers are still culturally seen as primary caretakers for young children, and often those mothers who return to work earlier than average need to deal with emotional aspects of whether or not they are fulfilling the prevailing conceptions of "good motherhood". Emotions are part of the picture also for the fathers who take long leave periods. It was very important for the interviewed fathers to be taken seriously as competent carers. To be a good father was for them not only to bring home a salary, but also to devote time to the child and make choices that are in the best interest of the child. For the fathers who had taken long leave periods, an important criterion for a "good father" seemed to be securing a longer home care for the child before he or she starts in daycare. Many of the interviewed fathers shared the concerns of child experts about daycare centers being too stressful for children under the age of 1 or 2.

Identities and values are involved in fathers' choices between work and family, but identities and values are also shaped through experience. Many of the interviewed fathers had decided to take leave with their spouse already during pregnancy. All of them had reconsidered their priorities in life during leave, and the experience of being the primary caretaker of the child influenced their way of thinking about fathering and helped them to find their own, individual way of caring. For example, the most career-oriented man in the sample ended up taking a long parental leave and realized that paid work was no longer the center of his identity. Similar identity processes took place also among the mothers: some of them realized after 1 year at home that they were not "homemakers" and that professional fulfilment was important for them.

Some of the fathers had previous experience of childcare, but many of them started their leave relying on the advice given by their spouse, and in some cases using also their own mother as a role model. The beginning of their care career was thus defined by feminine models, but they soon created their own practices and found their own parenting style that was usually different from the mothers but still based on meeting the needs of the child.

As the leave periods were relatively long, the fathers learned many new skills during their time home alone with the child, taking full responsibility for a very young child. They were often able to take advantage of these skills when they returned to work: they were more patient, more organized and more effective. This positive impact of parental leave may often remain invisible at the workplace level, be it for mothers or fathers who are returning from leave.

Negotiations with supervisors at the workplace take place after the negotiations at home have already happened, i.e. when the parents have agreed to share leave. At this point, only minor adjustments to the family plans can be made. The interviews showed that if support is lacking at the workplace, many fathers, and especially

those with an expert position, were likely to choose a more family-friendly workplace. Negotiations at work are thus reshaping the gendered family friendliness so that also male employees are allowed to be caring parents.

For the previous generation of fathers, the take-up of paternity leave while the mother was also at home was testing the limits of masculinity and modifying gender relations. It is, however, the take-up of leave by fathers alone with the child, i.e. taking full responsibility of childcare while the mother returns to work, that has a more significant transforming potential. At the moment, the transformation of gender relations is occurring mainly among middle-class parents: the father's month has been taken by highly educated men with spouses in white-collar positions. The same class-based pattern was typical when paternity leave was first introduced in the 1970s, but during the last decades the take-up of paternity leave has become mainstream among fathers from all socio-economic backgrounds. While young blue-collar fathers may also be willing to stay on a longer leave alone, the weaker labour market position of their spouses is often an obstacle. Thus, promoting gender equality at work and equal parenting at home may need to focus on both extending childcare leave rights for men and ensuring employment and career possibilities of women.

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